

Tape #26

Interview with Clarence Lux

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00:38 - Interviewer has Clarence spell his name for the record

05:55

CD: So if we could just start with you introducing yourself and telling us where you come from originally.

01:02

CL: Uh, I came out of a little town in the North East corner of Kansas. Name of the town was Troy, we were about 14 miles from St. Jose, Missouri. That's, that's where Kronkite came from. And uh, and when I joined they navy, I had, I had to go to St. Jose, they had a recruiting office there. Back in those days, this was Depression, and I was working in a Chevrolet establishment, greasing cars and so forth. But uh, and I graduated out of high school and, and I didn't feel like I was college material plus my family was quite poor and my dad was a barber. But anyway **(2:00)**, I decided I wanted to go to the Navy, so I'd gone to St. Jole, had an appointment and they said they'd contact me later, and I went back to work. Well, back in those days, the recruiting fellas, they'd come to your little town and find out how much trouble you'd gotten into, you know, as a teenager. And I guess if you would behave yourself enough why they'd...well anyway they came and told me they were gonna accept me. And they day that I went in, they sent me to Kansas City, Missouri, that's another 60 miles, where I held up my hand and joined the Navy. Then they put me on the train and sent me to Great Lakes training station. And when I got off of that train **(3:00)** I could hear all these guys hollerin' 'right, left, right, left', and I wondered 'what in the hell did I get into?'. (Laughs) But, I did what everybody else did, you went in, took all your clothes off, put 'em in a box, and they handed you some new clothes **(gestures being handed clothes)** you took a shower and put on the new clothes. (Laughs) And I was in the Navy.

03:28

CD: You tell that story beautifully Clarence (all laugh and crew readjusts 03:30-04:45)

04:45

CD: Why did you want to join the Navy Clarence?

04:47

CL: Well, primarily...to have 3 meals a day (laughs). It was the Depression and as I say I was workin', makin' about 12 bucks a **(5:00)** week. And, there

wasn't any future in that, and I didn't have the ambition really to think about college. So it was a, it was a, it was an opportunity for me, and I looked at it as a way to leave the little town and get out in the world, so it was an opportunity for me.

05:29

CD: So you go up to Great Lakes, and you're in your basic training.

05:34

CL: Right, right, and, 'course, during the, during the training, uh why, towards the end of it I got the flu and I'd heard all these guys saying 'well if you get sick and you go to sick bay, why that'll delay you a few companies **(gestures)**, you know, delay **(6:00)** ya a few weeks or a month or so. So I, I suffered it out, somebody went, went, went ashore and they brought me a little bit of the whisky **(gestures a small bottle)** and I took that one night and I sweat it out, and I come out of it okay (laughs). But anyway, I graduated with the company I was in, and they gave us a little leave and we went home for a couple of weeks as I recall and then we came back and got ready to get on the train to go to our ship. **(06:36 - Stop for planes at end)**

06:56

CD: So, what was your rank, what was your job and what ship were you assigned to.

07:02

CL: Oh, well...fortunately I got assigned to the USS Tennessee. And, first I went into the first division for about two weeks. And then, fortunately, I was assigned to the M Division, and the M Division is the main drive, uh, and I stayed there the entire war, but this was 1940 when I went in, and 'course when you go in, you're, you're a boot (laughs). Seaman first class or seaman second class, anyway. Eventually, during the war, they gave us rates pretty fast, and the...actually the big ships like that were training ships really, 'cause the young sailors would come aboard **(08:00)** for a few months and then after they got a little training, well they'd ship them off to other ships. Unfortunately, I never did get off, I stayed right there and I'd put in for schools and so forth and somebody would make a mistake and the division officer would say 'ship him off'. Well I was, I said I was so good I just never got caught, so I stayed on there. And you know, we were kids back in those days, I had a lot of fun, so...I eventually made chief machinist mate.

08:41

CD: So what was your job on the Tennessee?

08:45

CL: Well, we were down in the main drive section of the ship. And this was an electric drive ship, not to many of them, and the California was our sister ship. We had Westinghouse turbans and alternators and the California had

General Electric. I never was on the California, but uh, and for the fact that we had a big, our main turban was connected directly to the main alternator that's alternating electricity. But there were great big motors, one attached to each shaft that goes to the screw, four screws on the ship. But the, and, there was two...well I'll call 'em gears...if you want a description, the generator would turn twelve times to one turn of the screw **(gestures turning motion)** And, and, that, that was when you were cruising so **(10:00)** to speak. Another period it would go eighteen times to one screw. So, when you first started out it was an eighteen to one ratio, uh, but over in the, the two engine room we had forward and aft engine room and under each turban 'course there was a pump room 'cause after the steam went into the turban the steam had to come out of the turban into a condenser, a condenser meaning is a place where you condense steam back to water. And then the water's taken out of the condenser and pumped back to the boiler. So it's a constant cycle going on driving that turban. 'Course in that condenser there's a vacuum, maintained vacuum in order to condense that water very quickly **(11:00)**. We had a top speed of about 21 knots, on a battleship. And over the years there was a time or two where we'd have full power runs and what happens then is the turban speeds up and we'd drag the steam out of those boilers so fast, sometimes water carries over from the boilers, and when the water hits that turban, you've got a problem. And then it's time to back off real quick and slow everything down, but uh, it didn't happen very often. I've seen all the insulation coming off the steam lines **(mimics the ship shaking)** and everything is shaking so bad that you're hoping everything hangs together until we get calmed down, you know. But uh, but, but uh there were very shaw **(12:00)** ...various watches that you have because in that old ship all the oil that was pumped and heated for the boilers was done right in our pump room. And the feed pumps, that's the pump that takes the water and pushes it into the water, but they were over, under our watch and, 'course, you got big circulating pumps that pump seawater through the condenser, that's how you cool that condenser off, turn that steam back to water. So, and then we had auxiliary generators. These were generating the power that makes your lights, powers the guns, and all the other stuff that goes on the ship. So, we had, we had two generators in each engine room, and **(13:00)** a couple of them, even when you're in port, was always running in order to keep the lights on. But the, but it was a constant, constant operation, unless you were in the Navy yard someplace where you could get electricity, we were operating all the time. And, before the war started, when we'd go to sea, we, we'd stand **for all and for all**, and you'd get tired enough when you'd come up, you'd lie right down on the floor and go to sleep. That's the way it was (laughs) but during the war we had a full crew and that was much easier.

13:38

CD: So when you heard you were getting sent out to Hawaii on the Tennessee what were your thoughts about what Hawaii was, what it must be like there?

13:48

CL: Well all I knew is what I heard on the radio. I heard all the Hawaiian music you know, from the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and all that, but I thought of being, being treated, goin' out to Hawaii that was wonderful far as I was concerned. There was a lot of things goin' on as a kid that I didn't know about but, but I look forward to it. Course it was a little warmer than I like but, but I enjoyed it.

14:21

CD: Hold on one second.
(crew talking)

14:42

CD: So when you got into Hawaii what did you find? What was it like?

14:48

CL: Well, course it was nice weather and, and they had a, you know my brains don't work good anymore so, but I can remember they had a swimming pool and they called it Iaya or something like that, where sailors could go over there and swim in the pool, drink a beer or two, it was a nice place to go. And they had that little narrow gauge rail road over in Hawaii, and I can remember I once had a liberty and we got on that little train and we went out on the other side of the island someplace, anyway we slept in tents and they let us go out there on the beach except at high surf, they were worried about us going out there when the surf was high. But, there were a lot, a lot of mosquitoes and stuff out there, but it was a place to go to get off the ship. But uh, that was when I was a young kid, everything was fun then though, so, but I enjoyed Hawaii, nice place to be.

16:07

CD: How old were you when you first arrived at Pearl Harbor?

16:10

CL: I think I was 19. I've talked a lot of sailors that got in at 16, but I was 19, but I was still a kid. You know, ya.

16:22

CD: Do you remember what you were doing on the evening of the 6th of December?

16:27

CL: Well I was aboard ship and, 'cause back in those days we didn't have much money you know, it was a big deal to go city... on liberty. But, I was aboard ship and uh, I was still sleeping in a hammock then. The old ship you know, they had hooks on the overhead, course when you went through boot camp you slept in a hammock at boot camp and when I went aboard ship you had that same hammock with you, and you hung it on the hook in the ship. And,

so I was sleeping in a hammock at that point. After you made a rank or two, why, you might get an army cot and you put that on the deck, so you sleep on a little army cot after you made a rate or two. You got out of the hammock, so that was a big deal, ya.

17:33

CD: Could you walk me through what you remember of December 7th? What you saw? Where you were? What you did?

17:40

CL: Ya ... that morning we had, we had had breakfast, now those days are table we sat on to eat was **(gestures to ceiling)** hung on the overhead. And you got it down and there are some benches on there and you set the **(18:00)** benches down and, course we had breakfast. And, we had a young sailor that would run up the mess hall bring our food down, and course we had breakfast. And everything was cleaned up and the tables were back up, and we were sittin' around, killin' time more or less. And uh, in the morning like that we had a record player in our division, that everybody'd put a little money in the pot and they bought this record player and on Sunday morning it was common to put on some records and listen to 'em. And me and another kid went into the M Division office, this was a little spot, but in the compartments where we lived, why, why we'd gone in there and we were trying to play chess, and, er, anyway, I wasn't very good at it, **(19:00)** but that's where I was when the, when the general quarters signal went off. Well it was Sunday morning and everybody thought, something happened, something got shorted out or something. That wasn't the time to go on general quarters on Sunday morning. But, pretty soon, police PO's out of master armed shack. He come through and said, 'you guys man your battle stations, right now', so everybody come to and headed towards our battle stations. And I took a glance out of one of the port holes as I was going down, and I seen an airplane banking, and it had the rising sun on the tips of the airplane and there was a machine gun **(20:00)** firing and I seen the splashes just between us and Ford Island. 'Course, I didn't know the Japs were attacking us, I just didn't know what was going on yet. But anyway, we, I went to my battle-station and that was in the after pump room and I had two firing bilge pumps assigned to me that I was supposed to line up, maintain water pressure on the water main so that if a fire broke out they could fight fire with the seawater that I was pumping. And, after a while there was a hell of a rumble and the bulkheads close to me shook like they were gonna come apart **(mimics shaking)** and uh, and uh 'course I, we still didn't know what the hell was going on **(21:00)** but after that rumble and shaking, a lot of smoke come down, and I know they shut down the ventilators and then pretty soon we got messages over these sound power JV phones, we called 'em. And they were telling us all these stories about the Oklahoma turning over and the Arizona being sunk, all these things were going on out there, almost so we couldn't hardly believe that, that was, that was beyond our thinking. We had one kid down there that got all excited and, and, he was, he was, he was actin' very strange, and

our chief, he was a short pudgy guy, but he hit this kid in the jaw knocked him clean cold, told us to throw out some (22:00) rags on the auxiliary condenser, we laid him down there and he slept through it all (laughs). But uh, as time went on I had to speed those pumps up till I had them going as fast as they'd go and I still couldn't maintain 50 pounds. I learned later that they had all these fire hoses over the stern of the ship plying water out there to keep fire from the stern of our ship. 'Cause the fire, they did flood the...after...ah my brain just came apart...the after storage of all the powder and all that. And, gradually they started up the auxiliary part of the main drive unit. We knew we couldn't go anywhere because we were sitting right in front of the Arizona (23:00) we had the West Virginia on our port side, and the Maryland was in front of us, and the Arizona was off to our port-bow, and we were tied up to these quays so we knew we couldn't move, but they turned the screws, now at that time I didn't know what was going on, later I learned that the screws set up a wash and pushed the fire away from us and then by firing bilge pumps I could slow 'em down cause there was plenty of pressure, and that's how they pushed the fire away from us. Uh, but that went on for a while and everything kinda calmed down then. And, while we were down there, they eventually sent us some sandwiches, so we had something to eat and uh, and (24:00) it was evening before they, they excused us and let us come to the topside where we'd seen what had happened.

24:13

CD: Could you paint the scene of what you saw when you finally came topside?

24:17

CL: Well, it was unbelievable because there was still alotta oil, there was bodies floating on the surface, I could see the Oklahoma had rolled over, the Arizona was blown up, it was, everything was dirty and black, it was unbelievable. And as we stood there looking, somebody said, 'well they'll probably come back this evening'. And we wondered what we were in for, cause uh, it was a pretty, pretty dark picture for a little while, course we were young and we could stand around talk (25:00) about those things, but I still didn't get afraid like you'd think people would. Uh, it was, it was a hell of a thing to go through, yet it was almost like a dream to me, it wasn't something, you suddenly was scared and everything was fallin' apart. You kinda walked around in a dream...and so we eventually hit the sack and slept that night and everything was peaceful after that.

25:39

CD: What did you do the next day?

25:41

CL: The next day after we got up I, they were...everybody available was supposed to start chipping paint, cause the paint on the West Virginia and all those, we actually seen the paint burn, and it was common in the Navy, you know, we paint everything, (26:00) keep it from rustin'. But we were

chippin' paint, everybody had a spot...chippin' paint, and then they'd tell us '(stumbles on words)...stop chippin' paint, two man sub in the area'. And, and they they found a couple of subs but they never did any harm to us. But uh, and I heard later that the degauzing cable got punctured or damaged in some way and, anyway, uh I don't know, I think it was probably a third of the day or so before they blasted the quays away from us, Maryland got under way and moved out, and then we got underway and moved out, went over to the Navy yard and they repaired our degauzing cable (27:00) I guess this is something that keeps a ship free from radar or something, some that nature, I'm not schooled in that so that's not my line. But uh, in just a few days we got under way and got back to the states, yeah.

27:23

CD: Did you lose any friends during the attack?

27:35

CL: Oh they lost several guys on topside. One bomb, they said it was a 500 pound bomb, hit the corner (27:37 cell phone rings)

27:49

CD: Did you lose any friends during the attack?

27:51

CL: Well not any friends, but we've lost shipmates on the topside because ah (28:00), there was several bombs that hit the ship, one of 'em, as I say, hit number 3 turret, and it, and it penetrated the top of the turret but it didn't explode, it spilled it's powder as I understand and several guys got killed down there from the fire that it was created. But it didn't explode all our ammunition or anything like that, it was in a sense minor, but nonetheless it penetrated that, that turret. Now there was other bombs that the, up on the bridge and so forth, I don't know as much about this as some of the guys who were up in that section. But there were several guys got killed and that next morning even in our chow line I, I met a young man who was off the West Virginia (29:00) The West Virginia had sunk, but she just settled down in the, in the mud so to speak, her quarter deck was full of water. But this young man had gray hair and he said he didn't have gray hair the day before (laughs). That's one of the stories that I remember, yeah.

29:22

CD: What was the mood like down in your general quarter station when the attack was going on?

29:27

CL: Well things were pretty quite, as I say, we were living, we couldn't believe the things we were hearing. But we, we stayed on watch and, and there was no excitement or anything as I recall. We just took things hour by hour

as they came, and as I say we didn't realize what was going on all we knew was what, the stories we were hearing.

30:00

END OF TAPE